

DHS Matters!

Michigan Department of Human Services • Lansing, Michigan • August 2, 2005
Produced by DHS Office of Communications, Suite 1510, Grand Tower, Lansing
Submit stories by e-mail to DHS-Newsletter@michigan.gov

New assistance application on the horizon

Since last summer the Department of Human Services has been in the process of redesigning, revising and simplifying the application a client uses to apply for program benefits. The Application Steering Committee – comprised of DHS field, program and administrative staff and representatives of agencies outside state government – has worked on the changes through meetings, focus groups and by getting input from field staff and the public on a Web site.

Unlike the current six-page application, the new product will be in two parts – a 16-page Assistance Application and 16-page Information Booklet providing selected program information with program requirements and legal information that is given to the client at the time the application is filled out.

In January the steering committee met with representatives from Kleinmann Communication Group in Washington, D.C., a group that works with the U.S. Food and Nutrition Service to help make these kinds of applications easier to read and use. The consultants provided information on how to appropriately test the application form with DHS clients and employees to see if there were major problems prior to implementation.

"We did usability testing with the revised application in five counties (10 applicants) in March", said Julie Lewis of DHS Bureau of Family Support Services. Lewis is managing the application redesign process and chairs committee meetings. "Clients really like the new version."

Lewis said one client who was mentally challenged said the questions were easy to read and understand. "This was the first time he has applied for help and the entire process resulted in a good experience," she said. "There were a couple of areas that were a problem for him and he really appreciated that we were asking for his opinion. He gave the testers suggestions about how we could fix those areas."

Another client, a young mother who has filled out the old application several times, said: "It's like reading a story. It flows nicely and reads easy. The caseworkers (that participated in testing) also liked the application." DHS officials have also shown the redesigned product to members of the state Legislature.

The Information Booklet will be tested with DHS clients in mid-August. Changes will be made based on test comments and then both the Assistance Application and Information Booklet will be sent out for final departmental review. The project is scheduled for release during October 2005.

A "What's New" message on DHS-Net will alert DHS county directors and agency administrators to review the application and booklet, available on the Assistance Application Revision Project Web site. An email address is provided on the Web site for comments or suggestions. For more information on the redesign process go to www.michigan.gov/dhs-application



Assistance Application committee members (l-r): Larry VanDeSande, Jackie Doig, Dan Ellis, Anne Bialke, Roberta Rodriguez, Melinda Thompson, Barb DeWitt, Lois Baker, Tracy Ryan and Julie Lewis. All are DHS employees except Doig, who represents Saginaw-based Center for Civil Justice. Committee members not pictured include Jean Lantzer-Brailey, Dianne Morales and Jeni Ottney.

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Employees show involvement during meeting

Two DHS employees from different parts of the department explained their involvement in collaborative projects supported by the Head Start State Collaboration during that group's advisory board meeting in Lansing July 19.

Joyce Wright, a member of the staff from Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board, talked about her role in a training program. She recently took part in a pilot training project targeted to family service workers in Head Start facilities.



Joyce Wright

The project developed a comprehensive strategy to address domestic violence, child abuse, substance abuse and welfare in Head Start facilities. Michigan was one of six states to receive grant funds for the project.

Wright attended training in Oklahoma in a train the trainer program, then piloted the training in three metropolitan Detroit facilities. She said the program provided comprehensive information and skills on how to identify and address domestic violence in families. The project also encouraged Head Start to collaborate with other community organizations on domestic violence, substance abuse and child abuse.



Gonzales-Cortes

Martha Gonzales-Cortes

director of DHS Migrant Affairs, spoke to the advisory board about the Migrant Children's Task Force that is supported by the Head Start State Collaboration. The task force is looking at issues

around childhood and migrant service with priority on access to comprehensive community services for migrant children and families.

In 2004 the task force began its collaboration with the Head Start State Collaboration, DHS Child Day Care, the Michigan 4C Association and a federal representative. Its goal is to improve services including additional child day care aide training in migrant environments.

Gonzales-Cortes described the conditions migrant workers live under in Michigan, with as many as 22,000 living in almost 4,000 licensed housing units. Another 100,000 adults and their children live in unlicensed facilities or elsewhere. Gonzales-Cortes showed photos of some unlicensed facilities with illegal electrical hookups to power poles outdoors. In some she said 3-4 housing units share a garden hose for water. In addition there is little regulation of migrant housing (Michigan Department of Agriculture has three inspectors, she said) and some localities have no zoning laws preventing the development of what are essentially shanty towns. About migrants and housing Gonzales-Cortes said, "They live in tents, at camp sites, in vehicles, under trees."

■ The Head Start State Collaboration is administered through DHS and includes representation on DHS Office of Children and Adult Licensing and the Early Childhood Investment Corporation. Contact: Nancy Willyard WillyardN@michigan.gov

Ka'zoo team raises \$1,300 to fight cancer

By Cindy Woolley

Kalamazoo County DHS, Kalamazoo

WoolleyC@michigan.gov

The American Cancer Society's Relay for Life is a team event to raise money for the fight against cancer. For the past three years Kalamazoo County DHS employees have participated in the Relay for Life. To help in the fight against cancer, the team raises money for many months prior to actually walking in the Relay.

For a few employees, their involvement began in 2002.

Cindy Woolley, **Mollie Dimock** and **Michele Chandler**

(who currently works in Ingham County) decided to form a team and walk in the event. Each year the team has grown and each year this deadly disease has affected more coworkers.



Kalamazoo County employees that participated in Relay For Life (back row l-r): **John Davis**, **Teri Howard**, **Mollie Dimock**, **Debi Hatten**, **Heather Wellington**, **Bess Klobucher**, **Nico Seinen**, **Christine Miller** and **Cindy Woolley**. Front row: **Nancy Kruithof** and **Kendra Ragan**.

This year the Relay for Life Event was held June 23-24. It was held at a local high school's track and the goal is to have someone walking the track from your team for a 24-hour period. This year the Kalamazoo DHS Team's financial goal was to collect \$1,200 but we exceeded our goal by raising over \$1,300!

This year's team captains – **Cindy Woolley**, **Kendra Ragan**, **Bess Klobucher** and **Mollie Dimock** – became very creative with fundraising ideas to achieve their goal. The team sold candy bars, Relay for Life bears, and had bake sales.

It is so awesome to bind together with your coworkers to raise money for such a worthy cause and have such a good time doing it! Thanks to everyone who supported us this year. For more information about the Relay for Life go online to www.cancer.org/RelayOnline

Oakland County consolidating service locations

From Lynn Contreras

Oakland County DHS, Bloomfield Hills

ContrerasL@michigan.gov

In an effort to improve our assistance and response to our vulnerable children and adults, Oakland County recently began consolidation of our Child and Family Services and Adult Protective Services programs and staff at a single location. This move includes all Adult and Children's Protective Services (APS, CPS), Foster Care, Adoption and Juvenile Justice managers and staff and the clerical support aligned with the staff.

A consolidated CPS and APS district office will operate within the Baldwin Road district office under the leadership of [Velvet Savage](#), the current district manager at Walled Lake. The Foster Care, Adoption and Juvenile Justice staff and managers will exist as a separate district, also within the Baldwin Road site, under the leadership of their current manager, [Melvin Kaufman](#).

AP and Adult Services staff (non-APS) from the Baldwin Office will be reassigned to the remaining general services districts – Madison Heights, Walled Lake and Saginaw Street.

We feel that this move will strengthen our department's commitment to the well-being of our children and adults at risk by promoting greater consistency in the application of policy, protocols and best practices among staff and managers, and by providing better communication between involved staff. We are indeed hopeful that this approach will help provide us with improved resources needed to produce better outcomes on behalf of children and families.

We would also like to announce the assignment of [Longino "Gino" Gonzales](#), the former DHS deputy director for children's services, to Oakland County. Gonzales has responsibility for addressing the application of best practice and uniformity in department policy as well as training and other quality assurance issues that will support the objectives of our consolidation. Gino has been a great help in this consolidation process and we welcome him to Oakland County.

The changes started July 11 and will conclude in mid to late August. Oakland County Central Administration remains housed at the Stoneridge office. Any questions regarding this move should be directed to [Kay Green](#), administrative services manager in Oakland County at (248) 975-4815.

Date: July 5

To: Macomb County Mt. Clemens District
Clinton Township

Subj: [Bonnie LeFleur](#)

I wish to commend the professionalism and courtesies extended to me last week by one of your outstanding employees. I am employed by Macomb County at the Juvenile Court. I understand how hectic it can be when trying to properly direct clients within our court system.

I am currently on Family Sick Leave due to my husband's terminal illness. With heavy heart, I had to apply for Medicaid as my husband was being placed that morning in a nursing home. Ms. LeFleur recognized my grief and, as my tears were streaming, made necessary phone calls to Port Huron to obtain proper information for me. I had been given incorrect information by social workers and others. Time was of the essence as I had driven 25 miles from my Richmond residence and had to be in St. Clair, Michigan within the next two hours for his admissions. It appeared that the problem could not have been solved without my driving an additional 50 miles round trip to Port Huron until Ms. LeFleur handled the situation.

She should be commended for her work ethics and compassion. It is difficult to find such caring and efficient individuals in today's work place. One of the most painful experiences of my life was made somewhat less difficult due to her interaction and I thank her from the bottom of my heart.

[Regina Miller](#)

Richmond

■ *Bonnie LeFleur works in administrative support at reception in the Mt. Clemens office.*

Your letters,
intercepted
and otherwise

Date: June 1
To: Marianne Udow, Director
Department of Human Services
Subj: Sue Caraffino and Linda Labron

I am a former department Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) who retired from what was then known as the Family Independence Agency. I had been in that position since 1992 until my retirement in March 2004. During my years in the department I had the opportunity to do business with all the county offices and to observe the manner in which many department personnel conducted business.

One local office still stands out in my mind after more than a year since my retirement. I am referring to the **Chippewa County local office in Sault Ste. Marie**. I conducted many in-person hearings in that office and quickly became aware of the high degree of customer service that the staff provides. I noted that everyone going into that office was treated with genuine courtesy and respect. I emphasize "genuine."

Most of the hearings I conducted in the office related to issues involving medical assistance. There are two eligibility specialists who obviously to me went the extra mile to assist customers in making a determination as to their eligibility for the various programs. They are Sue Caraffino and Linda Labron. If you ever need an example of excellent and dedicated department employees, you know where you can find them.

They are extremely knowledgeable in statewide and local policy. They always kept me (Administrative Hearings) informed of the status of all hearing files in their possession. That means I never had to waste time getting on the phone to inquire about the status of an interim order, for example. Not many people are aware of how much time an ALJ spends tracking down information from the local offices that should have been provided without constant prodding.

There are many, many fine department employees throughout the state in addition to these two outstanding individuals. I hope you have some procedure in place whereby you are able to identify these good folks from time to time and to express your appreciation for their work. Often a heartfelt and sincere "thank you" will go a long way.

We unfortunately live in an age when workers in the trenches and on the front lines are not appreciated nor recognized. I think these great workers deserve at least this little bit of thanks and recognition.

Terrence Merrick

Eaton Rapids

Date: May 17
To: Robert W. Peck Jr., Administrative Manager
Kalamazoo DHS, Kalamazoo
Subj: Thanks!

How delightful it was to receive your unexpected donation to Healthy Babies-Healthy Start! We will be using your \$205 contribution to help send three neighborhood members to a conference on preventing adolescent pregnancy - a disturbingly frequent occurrence in our county. Thank you!

Usually this is the part of the letter where I describe all the good work we're doing and how you just participated in that effort. Instead, I'd rather focus on you and your colleagues in the Department of Human Services. Just how good are you? Let me count the ways...

In times like these when the state economy is struggling to keep her fiscal nose above water, you're still there helping Michigan's neediest citizens. In the face of persistent and painful reductions in your operating budgets, you're still there. With fewer workers, you are asked to do more and do it quicker.

While you labor in the trenches of social service, you hear egg-headed pundits airily expounding on the dialectic of poverty and why the fat must be cut from the social safety net and how the needy would be so much better off if we would just let them fend for themselves. Still you persevere. You put the service back in the social service and on behalf of all those in our community who benefit from your perseverance. Thank you- I'm proud to be in the trenches alongside you.

Matthew Baldwin-Wilson, Project Manager
Healthy Babies-Healthy Start Kalamazoo County

DHS Matters! is a product of Michigan's Department of Human Services
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Larry VanDeSande, editor • Submit stories by e-mail to: DHS-Newsletter@michigan.gov